

VZCZCXRO2627
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHBP #0043/01 0221515
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 221515Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9930
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0428

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000043

SIPDIS

ACCRA FOR ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICER GEOFFREY HUNT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [ML](#) [SENV](#)

SUBJECT: DROUGHT THREATENS MALI'S MIGRATORY ELEPHANT HERD

REF: 08 BAMAKO 396

¶1. Summary: In meetings on January 13 and 21, representatives of international conservation groups Save the Elephants and the WILD Foundation told the Embassy that prolonged drought is severely threatening the estimated 400 to 600 elephants in Mali's Gourma region. This herd is the only surviving group of elephants in the Sahel. The watering holes along the elephants' migratory path through Mali are drying at a much faster rate than in previous years and are expected to be completely dry by April. The representatives said urgent action was needed to replenish local water supplies to prevent elephant deaths and avoid potentially deadly clashes with nearby human populations. Conservation efforts by the Malian government and international conservation groups in Gourma are ongoing and have been successful in the past. The current situation, however, requires a heightened response to repair water pumps and dig new wells along the elephants' migration route. End Summary.

Drought Threatens Mali's Elephants

¶2. On January 13, Save the Elephants representative Jake Wall briefed the Embassy on what he described as a dire situation for the elephants in Mali's Gourma region. Wall had spent the previous two weeks surveying the watering holes and proximate villages of Banzena, Inadiatafane, and Indamane to determine the extent of the water shortage affecting the region. Using global positioning systems (GPS) technology, Wall demonstrated that the perimeter of the lake in Banzena, the primary source of water for the elephants from February through May, was significantly reduced when compared to its perimeter this time last year. Located in the village of Banzena are two bore holes and one well that have been used in prior years to replenish the lake. Wall said such replenishment is not an option this year because the diesel pumps for the bore holes are broken and the remaining well is deteriorating for unknown reasons.

¶3. The water shortage is primarily a result of increasing population pressures from new human settlements and cattle grazing activity in the region. The expansion of villages lacking sufficient water supply means that both villagers and cattle must travel to the lake in Banzena for water. The radius of cattle grazing is constantly expanding; in some cases, cattle travel a distance of 40 kilometers each day to make the round trip from their grazing areas. Even in good years, there are few viable water sources for the elephants by the month of May, especially for the females and young.

Conservation Strategies

¶4. Securing the survival of Mali's elephants requires both long and short term conservation strategies. In

collaboration with a number of conservation groups, the Malian government has undertaken a number of projects toward this end (reftel). The Gourma Biodiversity Conservation Project for Mali is a six year (2005-2011) USD 10 million project funded by the World Bank aimed at stopping and reversing biodiversity degradation in key conservation areas and other specific sites in Gourma. Save the Elephants and the WILD Foundation partnered with the Malian National Nature Conservation office (DNCN) under the Environment Ministry on a GPS collaring project to track elephants' migration. The goal of this project is to delineate the migratory path and keep it free of human settlements.

¶ 15. The Embassy is currently working with the U.S. Forest Service and the Regional Environmental Office in Accra to craft a comprehensive conservation project for potential economic support funds. Embassy Bamako secured USD 300,000 in ESF funds for an elephant conservation project administered by the WILD Foundation in 2003. This was followed by an additional USD 150,000 in ESF money. The findings of this project, which was conducted in coordination with the DNCN, provided essential base-line data that formed the backbone of the World Bank's Biodiversity Conservation Project. Our current proposal would join the efforts of the U.S. Forest Service, Save the Elephants, local NGOs, and the DNCN to develop a sustainable solution for water use at Banzena. The project would also work with the Ministries of Environment and Sanitation, Tourism, and Culture to promote collaboration on ecotourism in the region and ensure that revenues are used toward the costs of regulation and maintenance of conservation projects.

BAMAKO 00000043 002.2 OF 002

¶ 16. In the short term, the current water shortage at Banzena could be alleviated by purchasing two new diesel pumps for the existing bore holes. Susan Canney of the WILD Foundation said reactivating the bore holes would allow the lake to be restored as the primary watering hole for the elephant herd, thereby also reducing the risk of human-wildlife conflict in competition for water. Canney indicated she would meet with representatives of the Biodiversity Project to discuss funding for the new pumps.

MILOVANOVIC